



Motivation and Learning: The 5 Keys

There are many ways to motivate students in the classroom and these are the five most successful ones that have worked for me over my 20 year career teaching middle school students. And I think we can agree that this age group is unique, to say the least! They are hormonal yoyos best described as being a combination of the “terrible twos” and “menopausal”. It’s a challenge to say the least!

1.) Kids today need a **safe environment** in which to learn and it is up to us as teachers to make the classroom safe both physically and emotionally. How to do that? First, your rules have to be fair, enforceable, and not allow bullying, teasing, or negative comments. When these negative actions happen, and they will, you need to immediately stop the behavior and make this a learning lesson on how to behave properly to one another.

Emotionally, many of our students do not feel safe participating in the classroom. This may have resulted from being made to feel stupid in the past, or being teased by classmates, or too many reasons to list here. Suffice it to say that many feel intimidated or dumb and will not risk public embarrassment. This is where my active learning strategies (motivation and learning games) come in. I have found that all students will play these games because they are safe and geared for all students to succeed. It is so fun and rewarding to literally see the light come back into those students’ eyes who had turned off to learning. They know that they’re going to participate in something that is fun, safe, and that they will be able to succeed in it regardless of their academic abilities. Powerful stuff!

2.) A powerful communication tool to use in the classroom to increase motivation and learning is the use of the “**I message**”. I regret that I learned this late in my teaching career because it is so powerful. I goes like this: I feel _____(emotion) when you _____(action). I need you to _____(action that needs to happen instead). Let’s say a student is talking and not paying attention to your lesson. You would say: I feel angry when you talk while I’m giving a lesson. I need you to stop talking now and listen to this information. When I remembered to use it, it worked every time. It’s also a wonderful communication life skill to use in daily life!

3.) The **positive comment** is a tremendous motivation and learning strategy to use. So many of our students’ home lives are terrible. Many live in conditions that you and I would not want to endure, and yet they have no choice. Their internal self-talk is so negative and damaging that the more positive things we can say the better. And yes, they need to be true statements, not just things made up to make them feel good. Often, the only place they hear anything positive is from their teacher. Let that person be you.

4.) The best way that I have found to motivate my students is by making sure that they can be successful learning the required material. I do this by combining active learning strategies into everyday lessons. I have over 30 ready to use, proven effective, strategies in my book **How to Motivate the Unmotivated Student™**. I have strategies that make games out of lecture note taking, doing worksheets, content review, video note taking, test review, reading for content, and they work for all content areas and grade levels. Plus, they are quick and easy to prepare, cost little or nothing to create, and are fun and effective. Sound too good to be true? Not anymore! You can get 4 free lesson plans of my most popular motivation and learning games at my web site www.martashea.com and see for yourself.

5.) We all need **fun and laughter** in our lives, and that goes for the classroom too. If you make learning fun, you won't have to do what some teachers do and cover the face of the clock. Your students won't be clock-watchers, because they'll be having too much fun learning! If they do look at it at all, it will be see how much time they have left because they won't want to leave your class! I've lost count of the times my students have said things like, "Ahh, you mean we have to stop playing now?" or "Wow, the time really goes fast in this class", or "All we did was play all period, but I went from a C on my pretest to an A in one period!" The fun and laughter in my room started when I started making learning a game where everyone was a winner!

Try these motivation and learning 5 keys in your classroom, if you aren't already, and see how well they work for you. There's no better time than now.